

Talma, Louise

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Cohn, Arthur, Dorothy Regina Holcomb, Sara Jobin, Virginia Davidson, Gregg Smith, and Sarah B. Dorsey. "Talma, Louise." In *Grove Dictionary of American Music, Second Edition*, edited by Charles Hiroshi Garrett. Oxford University Press, 2013, article revision.

"Talma, Louise," pp. 105-107, volume 8, *Grove Dictionary of American Music, Second Edition*, edited by Charles Hiroshi Garrett, 2013, reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press. <http://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195314281.001.0001>

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Abstract:

Talma, Louise (*b* Arcachon, France, 31 Oct 1906; *d* Saratoga Springs, NY, 13 Aug 1996). Composer and pianist of French birth. She studied at the Institute of Musical Art, New York (1922-30); at the Fontainebleau School of Music (summers 1926-39), where her teachers included ISIDORE PHILIPP (piano) and NADIA BOULANGER (composition); and at New York (BMus 1931) and Columbia (MA 1933) universities. She taught at Hunter College, CUNY (1928-79), and was the first American faculty member at the Fontainebleau School (1936). She became a Fellow of the MacDowell Colony in 1943 and holds the lifetime record for residencies there. Her many awards include two Guggenheim fellowships (1946, 1947), becoming the first woman to receive two; a Senior Fulbright Fellowship (1955-6); the Sibelius Medal for Composition from the Harriet Cohen International Awards, London (1963); and election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1974), the first woman to be so honored. Her opera, *The Alcestiad*, was the first by an American woman to be performed in a major European opera house (1962, Frankfurt).

Keywords: Louise Talma | composers | biography | MacDowell Colony

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Talma's early works are tonal and neoclassical, showing the influence of her strong background in counterpoint and her study of Igor Stravinsky with Boulanger. Her whole output is marked by clarity of line, gesture, and proportion. The Piano Sonata no. 1 (1943) and the exuberant Toccata for Orchestra (1944), both superbly tailored to their respective instrumentations, incorporate elements of jazz and Americana. Exemplifying the range of her style during this early period is the rhythmic vitality of the *Alleluia in Form of Toccata* for solo piano (1945) and, by contrast, the impressionistic languor of *Terre de France* (1943-5).

In 1952, after hearing Fine's String Quartet, Talma began to experiment with serialism; her mature style incorporates 12-note techniques within a freely tonal context. She did not adhere to strict set technique, but arranged subsets in tonally related patterns, such as in the Violin Sonata (1962), or distributed row elements among voices, as in the cantata *All the Days of My Life* (1963-5). In the song cycle *Diadem* (1978-80), clever character sketches of seven gems, shimmering clarinet trills illustrating the "Aquamarine" give way to tile bold angularity of "Diamond." The circular structure of this work and its septuple division is also apparent in *Full Circle* for orchestra (1985), the last section of which (the seventh of seven) is a modified reversal of the first. The linear simplicity of *Seven Episodes* for flute, viola, and piano (1986-7) highlights Talma's talent for shaping a phrase; based on a row the first and last notes of which form a perfect 5th, this work exemplifies the dodecaphonic writing grounded in tonal relationship that is characteristic of her late style. Keenly aware of her surroundings, Talma penned music informed by natural elements from tone rows based on bird song in *Variations on 13 Ways* (1979) to a whole piece as a soundscape portrait of summer in New Hampshire with *Summer Sounds* (1969-73).

Vocal works form a significant portion of Talma's oeuvre. Her vocal writing displays the same lyricism as her instrumental writing, though many of her choral works are contrapuntal. Her strong religious faith is reflected in her many settings of Biblical texts. The only work for which she wrote the text (*Have You Heard? Do You Know?*, 1974-80) reveals an attachment to nature from her early childhood in the French countryside. Later in life this affection was rekindled at the MacDowell Colony where she composed most of her music. She left the colony a million dollars and rights to her works. She published *Harmony for the College Student* (1966) and *Functional Harmony* (with J. Harrison and R. Levin, 1971).

WORKS

STAGE

Op: *The Alcestiad* (3, T. Wilder), 1955-8, Frankfurt, 1 March 1962: *Have You Heard? Do You Know?* (L. Talma). divertimento in 7 scenes, S, Mez, T, pf (fl, cl, bn, tpt, vn, va, vc, db, perc, pf), 1974-80; New York, 7 Jan 1981

CHORAL

Spirit of the Lord (Bible), mixed chorns, pf/orch, nd; La belle dame sans merci (J. Keats), women's vv, 1929-30; 3 Madrigals (T. Wyatt), 4 women's vv, str qt or pf, 1929-30; Psalm xlii, mixed chorus, pf, 1936; Dominica Decima Quinta Post Pentecosten, T, male chorus, orch, 1938; Psalm xxxix, mixed chorus, pf, 1938, In principio erat verbum (Bible: *St John*), mixed chorus, org, 1939; Carmina Mariana (liturgy), 2 vv, pf, 1943 [arr. women's vv, org/small orch, 1966]; Infanta Marina (Stevens), women's vv pf, 1943; The Divine Flame (Bible, liturgy), orat, Mez, Bar, mixed chorus, orch, 1946-8; The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo (G.M. Hopkins), S, double mixed chorus, pf, 1950-51; Let's Touch the Sky (e.e. cummings), mixed chorus, fl, ob, bn, 1952; La Corona (J. Donne), 7 sonnets, unacc. mixed chorus, 1954-5; A Time to Remember (Bible, J.F. Kennedy, A.M. Schlesinger), mixed chorus, orch, 1966-7; Voices of Peace (Bible, Hopkins, liturgy, Bible: *St Francis*), mixed chorus, str, 1973; Celebration, women's chorus, small orch, 1976-7; Ps lxxxiv, unacc. mixed chorus, 1978; Mass in English, unacc. mixed chorus, 1984; A Wreath of Blessings (W. Cartwright, G. Herbert, L. Larcom, anon.), unacc. mixed chorus, 1985; Give Thanks and Praise (Bible, W. Cowper), antiphonal double chorus, pf, 1989; In Praise of a Virtuous Woman (Bible: *Proverbs*), women's vv, pf, 1990; Ps cxv, unacc. mixed chorus, 1992

OTHER VOCAL

When the Storm Breaks for Him (anon.), S, pf, nd; Invocation to the Rain (Hopi Rain Song), S, pf, 1925; On the Surface of Things (W. Stevens), S, pf, 1926-7; Song in the Songless (G. Meredith), S, pf, 1928; 5 Sonnets from the Portuguese (E.B. Browning), S, pf, 1934; Late Leaves (W.S. Landor), S, pf, 1934; Never Seek to Tell Thy Love (W. Blake), S, pf, 1934; A Child's Fancy (E.K. Gould), song cycle, S, pf, 1935; When in Disgrace with Fortune and Men's Eyes (W. Shakespeare), S, pf, 1935; To Me, Faire Friend, You Never Can Be Old (Shakespeare), S, pf, 1935; From You Have I Been Absent in the Spring (Shakespeare), S, pf, 1935; Th'expense of Spirit is a Waste of Shame (Shakespeare), S, pf, 1935; Give Me My Scallop Shell of Quiet (W. Raleigh), SS, 1935; 14 Groundbass Variations on 13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird (W. Stevens), S I, S II, A, pf, 1938; I Fear a Man of Scanty Speech (E. Dickenson), S, pf, 1938; Hound of Heaven (F. Thompson), T and small orch, 1938; One Need Not Be a Chamber to be Haunted (Dickinson), S, pf, 1941; Carmina Matiana (liturgy), 28vv pt, 1943 [arr. women's vv, org/small orch, 1963-4]; Terre de France (C. Péguy, J. du Bellay, C. d'Orléans, P. de Ronsard), song cycle, S, pf, 1943-5; Leap Before You Look (W.H. Auden), S, pf, 1945; Letter to St Peter (E. Dean), S, pf, 1945; Pied Beauty (Hopkins), S, pf, 1946; Spring and Fall (Hopkins), S, pf, 1946; 2 Sonnets (Hopkins), Bar, pf, 1946-50; I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark (Hopkins), B, pf, 1946; No, I'll Not Go (Hopkins), B, pf, 1950; Christmas Carol (Talma), S, A, B, pf, 1959; Birthday Song (E. Spenser), T, fl, va, 1960; All the Days of My Life (Bible), cant., T, cl, vc, pf, perc, 1963-5; The Tolling Bell (W. Shakespeare, C. Murlowe, J. Donne), Bar, orch, 1967-9; Rain Song (J. Garrigue), S/T, pf, 1973; Diadem (Confucius, Med. Lapidaries), T/S, pf or T/S and vn, vc, fl, cl, pf, 1978-80; Variations on 13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird Stevens), S/T, fl/ob/vn, pf, 1979; Wishing Well (F. Tanzer), S, fl, 1986; Infanta Marina (Stevens), S, pf, 1988-90; The Lengthening Shadows (Donne, Keats, Landor, Hopkins), song cycle, S, pf, 1981-93

INSTRUMENTAL

Isabeau Poème, orch, nd; Wind Qnt, nd; Toccata, orch, 1944; Song and Dance, vn, pf, 1951; Str Qt, 1654; Sonata, vn, pf, 1962; Dialogues, pf, orch, 1963-4; 3 Duologues, cl, pf, 1967-8; Summer Sounds, cl, str qt, 1969-73; Lament, vc, pf, 1980; The Ambient Air, fl, vn, vc, pf, 1980-83; Studies in Spacing, cl, pf, 1980; Fanfare for Hunter College, 2 tpt, 3 trbn, 1983; Full Circle, chbr orch, 1985; 7 Episodes, fl, va, pf, 1986-7; Conversations, fl, pf, 1987; Spacings, va, pf, 1994

KEYBOARD

(solo pf, unless otherwise stated).

Untitled, 1932; 2 Dances, 1934; 4-Handed Fun, pf 4 hands/2 pf, 1939; Wedding Piece: Where Thou Goest, I Go, org, 1940; Pf Sonata no.1, 1943; Pf Sonata no.2, 1944-55; Soundshots, 20 short pieces, 1944-74; Alleluia in Form of Toccata, 1945; Italian Suite, 1946; Venetian Folly, ov. and barcarolle, 1946-7; Pastoral Prelude, 1949; Bagatelle, 1950; 6 Etudes, 1953-4; 3 Bagatelles, 1955; Passacaglia and Fugue, 1955-62; Textures, 1977; Kaleidoscopic Variations, 1984; Ave atque vale, 1989

MSS in *Wc*

Principal publisher: Carl Fischer

Principal recording company: CRI, Musical Heritage Society

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